

The Future is Now

21st Century Skills for all Vermont Students

Vermont State Board of Education
FY 09 Budget Recommendations
and Annual Report

January 2008

www.education.vermont.gov/net/html/pubs/budget_book_09.html



State Board of Education

Thomas James, Chair - Essex

(Term: 2005-2011)

879-1247/tomjames2@comcast.net

Ruth Stokes, Vice-Chair - Williston

(Term: 2005-2011)

879-7460/rstokes123@aol.com

Jessica Bullock - Shrewsbury

(Term: 2006-2008)

492-2070/jrbullock@vermontel.net

William Corrow - Williamstown

(Term: 2003-2009)

433-6035/wbcorrow@aol.com

Kathy Larsen - Wilmington

(Term: 2007-2013)

464-2263/KLarsen.007@gmail.com

Fayneese Miller - South Burlington

(Term: 2006-2012)

660-7141/Fayneese.miller@uvm.edu

Chris Robbins - Danville

(Term: 2003-2009)

748-3780/chrisarobbins@gmail.com

Tess Savage - Starksboro

(Term: 2007-2009)

453-4581/TessSavage@gmail.com

Susan Schill - Belvidere

(Term: 2003-2009)

644-2865/schills@wildblue.net

Brian Vachon - Middlesex

(Term: 2007-2013)

229-4441/BrianVachon@comcast.net

Department of Education

120 State Street /Montpelier, VT 05620-2501/828-3135/www.education.vermont.gov

Richard H. Cate
Commissioner of Education
828-3135/ richard.cate@state.vt.us

**Brian O'Regan, Deputy Commissioner
Education Services; Lifelong Learning**

828-5101/brian.oregan@state.vt.us

**Bill Talbott, Chief Financial Officer
Finance & Administration**

828-0470/bill.talbott@state.vt.us

Mark Oettinger, General Counsel

828-3135/mark.oettinger@state.vt.us

Marta Cambra, Director

Educator Quality

828-6543/marta.cambra@state.vt.us

Kerry Garber, Director

Independent & Federal Programs

828-3150/kerry.garber@state.vt.us

**Lisa Gauvin, Director
Information Technology**

828-3719/lisa.gauvin@state.vt.us

**David White, Director
Lifelong Learning**

828-0154/david.white@state.vt.us

**Gail Taylor, Director
Standards & Assessment**

828-5158/gail.taylor@state.vt.us

**Karin Edwards, Director
Student Support/Safe and Healthy Schools**

828-5118/karin.edwards@state.vt.us

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Message from the State Board Chair & Commissioner

We are submitting this FY 2009 budget in an era of austerity as growth in state revenues declines and the demands on the state budget increase. We recognize that one major component of the state budget, the impact of which is felt at the state and local level, is the cost of education. Voters, school boards and school administrators are confronted each year with deciding how to allocate public money to best meet the educational needs of our children. Their actions then translate into demands on the local tax rates and the Education Fund to meet those needs. We believe the investment the people of Vermont make in our education system is a worthy one because the very future of our state and nation relies on how well we prepare our children for the future.

The rate of annual growth in education spending has declined over the past four years from 6.6 percent in FY 2005 to 4.09 percent in FY 2008. Many people argue that this rate of increase should have declined even more or that there should have been an actual reduction in spending since there were fewer pupils in FY 08 than in FY 05. Unfortunately, there is not necessarily a proportionate reduction in cost when a school has fewer pupils. The fixed costs related to facilities and transportation remain and, if there are no significant changes in the operation of the school, the number of instructional staff is unlikely to change. A loss of five students from a school with a total enrollment of 50 is a 10 percent reduction, but it may only mean the loss of one or two students from each of several grades. This sort of enrollment change is unlikely to affect staffing levels. In spite of this, school leaders are constantly searching for creative approaches to maintaining educational quality within the context of limited resources and declining enrollment.

Just as it is clear that additional resources for education are scarce, there is also little doubt that schools are confronted with new challenges every day at a time when they are trying to improve the educational outcomes for all of their students. In an effort to help schools meet these challenges, the State Board of Education, Department of Education staff and the Commissioner committed last fall to a public engagement process related to the “Transformation of Education.” The goal of this process is to gain consensus among Vermonters about the key elements of a 21st Century Education in a student-centered learning environment.

We believe that, if we are to help every child be successful, we must effectively use all the tools available in this 21st century. Many of the educational practices that have evolved over the past two centuries are still valuable but that does not mean we should not challenge some assumptions that may be less than effective. What matters is that students become lifelong learners and that they acquire the skills needed to be successful. We are bringing as many people as possible into this conversation so we can hear all views. We are not yet sure where this journey will take us, but we are dedicated to pursuing it over the coming years. Even as we are successful in convincing our hundreds of school communities to engage in transformation, our efforts will not result in immediate change. Lasting change will take time and immense effort. However, we believe the effort to transform the way we provide educational opportunities for our students is a sound approach regardless of the fiscal environment.

Thank you for considering our budget request.



Tom James, Chair
State Board of Education



Richard H. Cate, Commissioner
Department of Education

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